



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

October 25, 2004

Mr. Jeff Lopez  
Assistant General Counsel  
Texas Department of Public Safety  
P.O. Box 4087  
Austin, Texas 78773-0001

OR2004-9095

Dear Mr. Lopez:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 214630.

The Texas Department of Public Safety (the "department") received a request for records related to a fatality accident involving a named individual. You indicate that you will release part of the requested information upon receipt of payment from the requesting party, but you claim that the remaining information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

We first address your assertion that the submitted information is excepted from public disclosure under section 552.101 in conjunction with section 58.007 of the Family Code. Section 552.101 excepts from public disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." Gov't Code § 552.101. This exception encompasses information that is made confidential by statute, including section 58.007. Section 58.007 provides in part:

(c) Except as provided by Subsection (d), law enforcement records and files concerning a child and information stored, by electronic means or otherwise, concerning the child from which a record or file could be generated may not be disclosed to the public and shall be:

- (1) if maintained on paper or microfilm, kept separate from adult files and records;
- (2) if maintained electronically in the same computer system as records or files relating to adults, be accessible under controls that are separate and distinct from controls to access electronic data concerning adults; and
- (3) maintained on a local basis only and not sent to a central state or federal depository, except as provided by Subchapter B.

Fam. Code § 58.007(c). Section 58.007(c) is applicable only to records of juvenile conduct that occurred on or after September 1, 1997. Open Records Decision No. 644 (1996). Section 58.007 is not applicable to information that relates only to a juvenile as a complainant, victim, witness, or other involved party and not as a juvenile suspect or offender. Since the juvenile listed in this file is the victim, we find that section 58.007(c) is not applicable to any of the submitted information. Thus, the department may not withhold any of the information under section 552.101 of the Government Code in conjunction with section 58.007 of the Family Code.

We next address your claim under section 552.108 of the Government Code. Section 552.108 excepts from disclosure “[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if: (1) release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime.” Gov’t Code § 552.108(a)(1). Generally, a governmental body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See* Gov’t Code §§ 552.108(a)(1), (b)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977). You state that the submitted information relates to a fatal motor vehicle accident. You further state that negligent homicide charges are pending in this case. Based on your representations and our review, we determine that you have demonstrated the applicability of section 552.108 to the submitted information. *See Houston Chronicle Publ’g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref’d n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases).

We note, however, that information normally found on the front page of an offense report is generally considered public. *See generally* Gov’t Code § 552.108(c); *Houston Chronicle Publ’g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref’d n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976); Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976). Thus, you must release the types of information that are considered to be front page offense report information, even if this information is not actually located on the front page of the offense report. Although section 552.108(a)(1) authorizes you to withhold

the remaining information from disclosure, you may choose to release all or part of the information at issue that is not otherwise confidential by law. *See* Gov't Code § 552.007.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this

ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L. Joseph James".

L. Joseph James  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

LJJ/seg

Ref: ID# 214630

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Mr. John R. Frazier  
Attorney at Law  
580 North 4<sup>th</sup> Street  
Wills Point, Texas 75169  
(w/o enclosures)